

If there was ever a million dollar, nay, a trillion dollar, yet, again, nay, rather, a ga-zillion dollar question, this would be it. And for that price, it better be, especially if the dollar-to-(insert foreign currency code here) exchange rate is worked in!

So, the whole story starts, you know, once upon a time, a monotheistic religion, with an All-Powerful God at its center, started up in the middle of a desert, in a humble town. Prior to that, the town had been full of illiterate pagans who worshiped stone carvings, but who, surprisingly, spoke a very highly refined and eloquent language called Arabic. That town was Mecca, and that religion was Islam.

Moving forward in time, many years after the Holy Prophet Mohammed ﷺ, the Emissary ﷺ whom God Himself ﷺ chose and entrusted with the responsibility of delivering His message to mankind, passed away, a Caliph, the legitimacy of whose rule is still contested today, decided to compile that message into a book. That book is the Holy Quran.

There are debates within Islam surrounding the need for such a decision on part of that caliph. One point that is raised has to do with the fact that the Holy Prophet ﷺ himself, during his life, had supervised the transcription of the Holy Quran, and also “signed-off” on the soundness of that transcription (ie. the verses that were revealed to him ﷺ by God, Allah ﷺ). So, one may wonder, why there would be a need, many years after the Holy Prophet ﷺ had passed away, to “re-invent the wheel,” so to speak.

Well, the answer one runs into most often is that there was a “standardization of the vowels” which became necessary to do, in that caliph’s opinion, as there were many variations in the way different tribes/areas/regions pronounced their Arabic. So this “standardization” was meant to bring some “order” into an otherwise “chaotic situation.”

Thus it was done. Thus it has remained: A Holy Quran, standardized, with vowels, for all subsequent generations to read and follow.

That is the generally accepted story of Islam and of the Holy Quran which all Muslims from all Islamic denominations regurgitate.

However, it has to be said that, even at this present time, at about one week away from 2021 CE, there is still a major internal dispute within the Muslim nation surrounding what actually took place during that period of “standardization.” To be frank, one of the reasons for the continually-sustained (major) split between the “Shia” and the “Sunni” sects, is the issue of alteration, or Tahreer, in the Holy Quran.

Although most (Usooli) Shia nowadays tend to vehemently refute Sunni claims that [alteration/Thareef] is part of Shia core beliefs, the Sunnis have taken the time and put the effort into researching Shia scholars of the past, and Allama Al-Majlisi RA, a renowned Shia scholar, in particular. They have done much legwork sifting through Al-Majlisi’s many volumes of books, and they have also funded and dedicated some internet resources which display the fruits of their labours.

It must be said that, although it may not come across clearly, these Sunnis, in spite of the blood and sweat they poured into their presentation, are *against* the notion of alteration/Thareef in the Holy Quran. They do not believe it has changed in any way whatsoever. This is, again, in opposition to the point they seem to be making. Be that as it may.

As mentioned above, the (Usooli) Shia, just to be clear, are actually not all on-board with Al-Majlisi’s claims, if that is what the Sunnis’s argument [is/may be] alleging. Not all Shias hold the same kinds of [understanding/beliefs] as their brethren. So, at the end of the day, the Sunnis say:

“Oh, you Shias, just look at the proofs your own revered Scholars use to show that the Holy Quran was altered at the time of the ‘standardization!’”

While the (Usooli) Shia retort: “No we won’t, because we don’t believe it’s been altered in any way in the first place!”

End of story? You wish, dear reader, you wish!

What both those groups have failed to realize is the effect that modernization has had on this issue, through exposure to Western culture.

Modernization has allowed for a rejuvenated and revitalized re-renaissance, one that affords modern English speaking Muslims, both Shia and Sunni alike, a fresh perspective with which to look upon the Book of God, the Almighty Allah ﷺ, the Lord of the East, *and* the West, as well as on the perfect job His messenger, and the Last Prophet, Mohammed Mustafa ﷺ did in delivering the Lord’s message to mankind.

And it all begins with us, English speaking, Westernized Muslims, who sincerely want to learn the truth about the universe, as well as about our religion and our heritage. But, unfortunately, we, having become Westernized, have to labour to learn “alien languages” like Arabic, Persian, Urdu, etc. Not just because they symbolically represent our parents, our lineage, and our heritage, but because they are the “morse code and/or encryption” in which most of the material we need to learn is found. And, for us to do a good job and get good results for our efforts, we have to learn those “alien languages” from the ground up. And that means, for each of those “encrypted alien languages,” us Westerners have to learn: **the grammar!!**

“What’s the big deal?” you may wonder, “it’s only grammar.” No, friend, it’s grammar that, once learned, has to be used to refit all that “alien talk and concepts” to match our English style of thinking, and in such a way that it will still make sense *to us*.

This means all cultural values that plague and influence how people speak their particular native non-English language, along with the native mannerisms they use, and the native figurative imagery they employ, and also the native social protocols with which they bind it all together, all become washed away once things are converted into plain, clear, English.

So, starting off right into it, when we, the Westernized Ones, for example, read the first two lines of the Holy Quran's chapter, Surah al-Baqarah, The Cow, we run into a HUGE problem.

Here is the Arabic version of (Ch. 2:1-2):

1. الْمَدْحُودُ لِرَبِّهِ هُدٌ لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ
2. ذَلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رِيبَ فِيهِ هُدٌ لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ

And here is it's (typical) English translation:

- 1: alif laam meem
- 2: This is the book in which there is no doubt, a [source of] guidance for they who are pious

Problem. Did you see it? It's right there. Re-read. See it now?

Here it is: (for they who know Arabic) what does the Arabic word ذلك mean in English? ذلك = (English) "that." So, why does every single translation of chapter (2:1-2) into English, and into any other non-Arabic language for that matter, show it to mean "this?"

Is Allah ﷺ has bad grammarification?

Does the All-Wise, and the All-Knowing (astaghfirullah) *not* know His demonstratives? Is Allah ﷺ, who is perfect in every way, "no speak the good Arabic?"

Well, there was one Shia scholar, Sheik Al-Jawwadi (RA; RIP), who clarified the implication of translating ذلك to mean "that," the way it is supposed to be translated (ie. grammatically correct), and here is his explanation:

When you translate "ذلك" as "that," the 2nd verse clearly makes reference to the first verse, and not to the entire Holy Quran, as is popular, standardized opinion. But then, the meaning of these two verse together becomes "alif laam meem, *that* is the book in which there is no doubt, a guidance for the pious..."; however, you then have to ask: what is "alif laam meem?" Well, these are what are called "sacred letters," and they are usually passed-off on as being "something of which only God has the knowledge." But that attitude would imply the Holy Prophet ﷺ left things unexplained, and (astaghfirullah) did not completely inform mankind of all of God's revelations. That cannot be so. For this reason, there are narrations, on both the Sunni and Shia sides, which say that wherever you see the Arabic letter "م-m-eem," as a sacred letter, it stands for "Mohammed," our Holy Prophet ﷺ. Then, if you look closely at the "tilde symbol '˜'" above the Arabic letters "alif" and "laam," it doesn't cover each one individually, as is usually the case for sacred letters found in other chapters. Here, that tilde covers both the alif and the laam letters, together, under one continuous squiggle. This implies the alif and the laam are actually one word, the smallest two letter word in Arabic, the word "ال-aal," which, in English, means "family." So, to conclude, (2:1-2) is actually saying: "The family of Mohammed, *that* is the book in which there is no doubt, a [source of] guidance for they who are pious."

So, that is what happens, from a Westernized Muslim perspective, when one refuses to accept the allegation that God, the Sublime, has bad grammar. But, the question remains as to why so many other people still insist: "When Allah says 'that,' He really means 'this,' along with the notion: "This rule just applies only when taking about *these two* particular verses of *this* particular chapter."

Isn't being stubborn on this point a type of intentional alteration to the meaning of the Holy Quran? Yes, at least in English, it clearly is.

And, that stubbornness also clearly implies a firm unspoken belief that: *Allah ﷺ has bad grammar*, along "with a heaping side-dish" of another unspoken belief that: *Allah ﷺ, astaghfirullah, is a hypocrite*: He ﷺ violates rules of proper grammar, while He expects mankind to hold up to His "lofty standards."

Here is what the Sunni brothers have to say about this:

وَأَمَّا كُونُ أَصْحَابَ تَحْرِيفِ الْمَعْنَى شَرًّا مِّنْ أَصْحَابِ تَحْرِيفِ الْلَّفْظِ مِنْ وَجْهٍ؛ فَلَأَنَّ تَحْرِيفَ الْمَعْنَى هُوَ الْأَكْثَرُ اسْتِعْمَالًا عِنْدَ أَصْحَابِ التَّحْرِيفِ؛ وَلَأَنَّهُ أَسْهَلُ رَوْاجًا وَسُوقًا عَنِ الْجَهْلَةِ وَالْعَوْمَ مِنَ النَّاسِ، فَيَفْتَنُ بِهِ مَنْ لَيْسَ لَدِيهِ زَادٌ مِّنَ الْعِلْمِ الصَّحِيفِ الْمُعْتَدَلِ عَلَى الْكِتَابِ وَالسُّنْنَةِ وَفَهْمِ سَلْفِ الْأَمْمَةِ¹

Translation:

As for *they who distort meaning, (they) perpetrate a greater evil* than they who outrightly distort the actual word. Distorting the meaning of a word is the most common route they who distort (the truth) like to take. Since it is an effortless task, its result can be readily deployed amid the illiterate and commoner classes of people, thereby [ie. derailing; misguiding] them about what is actually correct and true, as such people tend to (blindly? simplistically?) rely on "God's Book," and "Prophetic Tradition," and follow along (unreflectingly) with the rest of the pack.

Of course, on these points, Shias are (possibly) less likely to produce an opposing argument, but (some?) Sunnis are more likely to vehemently refute any and all praise of the Holy Prophet ﷺ's Holy Household ع, especially once it is unambiguously proven through God's Own *direct* Holy Words.

And, the application of our Shia scholar's explanation is not limited to just this one instance (Ch. 2:1-2), either, if you truly take it to heart. Check out the following chapter references to see Sh. Al-Jawwadi RA's insight *do its thang*:

²There are 29 Surahs that have the Huruf Muqatta'at (the "Sacred Letters"). These are:

1. Surah 2: al-Baqarah - Alif Lam Mim الْمَدْحُودُ لِرَبِّهِ هُدٌ لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ	5. Surah 11: Hūd - Alif Lam Ra الْمَدْحُودُ لِرَبِّهِ هُدٌ لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ
2. Surah 3: ale-Imran - Alif Lam Mim الْمَدْحُودُ لِرَبِّهِ هُدٌ لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ	6. Surah 12: Yusuf - Alif Lam Ra الْمَدْحُودُ لِرَبِّهِ هُدٌ لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ
3. Surah 7: al-A'raf - Alif Lam Mim Sad الْمَدْحُودُ لِرَبِّهِ هُدٌ لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ	7. Surah 13: ar-Ra'd - Alif Lam Mim Ra الْمَدْحُودُ لِرَبِّهِ هُدٌ لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ
4. Surah 10: Yunus - Alif Lam Ra الْمَدْحُودُ لِرَبِّهِ هُدٌ لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ	8. Surah 14: Ibrahim - Alif Lam Ra الْمَدْحُودُ لِرَبِّهِ هُدٌ لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ

¹From: <https://dorar.net/aqadia/1436/%D8>

² From: <http://www.quran-wiki.com/ayat.php?sura=68&aya=1>

9. Surah 15: al-Hijr - Alif Lam Ra الـر
10. Surah 19: Maryam - Kaf Ha Ya Ain Sad كـيـعـصـ
11. Surah 20: Ta Ha - Ta Ha طـهـ
12. Surah 26: ash-Shu'ara - Ta Sin Mim طـسـمـ
13. Surah 27: an-Naml - Ta Sin طـسـ
14. Surah 28: al-Qasas - Ta-Sin Mim طـسـمـ
15. Surah 29: al-Ankabut - Alif Lam Mim الـمـ
16. Surah 30: ar-Rum - Alif Lam Mim الـمـ
17. Surah 31: Luqman - Alif Lam Mim الـمـ
18. Surah 32: as-Sajdah - Alif Lam Mim الـمـ
19. Surah 36: Ya Sin - Ya Sin يـسـ
20. Surah 38: Saad - Saad صـ

21. Surah 40: Ghafir - Ha Mim حـمـ
22. Surah 41: Fussilat - Ha Mim حـمـ
23. Surah 42: ash-Shura - Ha Mim; Ain Sin Qaf حـمـ عـسـقـ
24. Surah 43: Az-Zukhruf Ha Mim حـمـ
25. Surah 44: ad-Dukhan - Ha Mim حـمـ
26. Surah 45: al-Jathiya Hā Mīm حـمـ
27. Surah 46: al-AHQaf - Ha Mim حـمـ
28. Surah 50: Qaf - Qaf قـ
29. Surah 68: Al-Qalam - Nun نـ

Four Surahs are named after their Muqatta'at letters, Surah Ta-Ha (20), Ya-Sin (36), Sad (38) and Qaf (50).

So, how will our Shia scholar's little tidbit about "alif laam meem," combined with our Sunni brothers' own opinion on the ethics of distorting meaning, now affect your understanding of God's Word, ie. based on one simple question:

Is Allah ﷺ has bad grammaticalization?

Peace and prosperity, always!

Your Brother in Faith,

SMH Razvi
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NB: To clear up any misunderstanding about how someone can be called "الكتاب"-(the) Book," it should be noted that even the staunchest of the Holy Prophet ﷺ's opponents described him صـ as "[the animate; the 'walking, talking'] Holy Quran." And, in terms of considering the Holy Prophet ﷺ "a walking, talking Holy Quran," of course, the Shia belief, in addition to this, is that the *entire* Holy Household عـ of the Prophet صـ, comprised of Amir Al- Momineen, Lady Fatima, Imam Hasan, Imam Hussain, all the way to the 12th Imam عـ, are all also just like the Holy Prophet صـ in this regard.